



# Georgian Dream MP Giorgi Khelashvili on the Accusations against Them



INTERVIEW BY EREKLE POLADISHVILI

**WE WELCOMED 25,000 RUSSIAN AND BELARUSSIAN PEOPLE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR. HOW MANY UKRAINIAN REFUGEES DID GEORGIA ACCEPT?**

The ruling party has had to face many challenges in its 10 years of power, but the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war hit them harder. The migrant crisis, joining the sanctions, the EU candidate status, and, of course, the role of the opposition – these were the key issues GEORGIA TODAY asked Giorgi Khelashvili, an MP from the Georgian Dream faction and Deputy Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee.

I think 25,000 is an overblown and exaggerated number. I don't follow these things on a daily basis or know the statistics, but what I heard is that this is a natural, average inflow of tourists. There were some speculations by the opposition about the increased security risks of this inflow of visitors from Russia and Belarus, but as far as I know from our agencies, who are dealing with this issue, there is no significant near secu-

urity risk. Of all things, there are up to 20,000 security personnel stationed in Tskhinvali and in Abkhazia as an occupational force, and they represent a danger to Georgia's independence and territorial integrity, not the few thousands of people who might be potentially discontented with the policies of their president, Putin, and who just crossed into Georgia.

I don't have an exact number, but we do have Ukrainian refugees. The usual practice is that these refugees usually cross the border with Poland, and then they choose where to go, afterward. The statistics suggest that those of them who have relatives in Georgia opt to come to Georgia. The number of such refugees is not high at the moment, but I expect the number to grow in the future.

**WHO OBLIGED PRIME MINISTER GARIBASHVILI TO SAY THAT GEORGIA WOULD NOT JOIN THE SANCTIONS?**

I don't think it was an obligation. The PM said very plainly what Georgia proceeded to do. It was a simple statement of fact that Georgia has very limited resources to inflict such a measure on Russia that could actually terminate Russian aggression against Ukraine. As it happens very often, this statement was taken out of context and exaggerated and amplified by the opposition media and also in the international press.

Continued on page 7

# 6th Week of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: War Crimes & New Phase of War



People fleeing Ukraine cross into Romania Daniel Mihalescu/AFP via Getty Images

BY ANA DUMBADZE

In the 6th week of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Russian troops are leaving scenes of devastation behind them - destroyed apartment buildings, mass graves and bodies lying in the streets - as they leave the area around Kyiv and pull back and focus on gaining full control of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the east, which are already largely controlled by Russia.

The above move points to the failure of Moscow's initial plans to take Kyiv and thus gain an advantage in the war by occupying the capital.

As Russian troops retreat from northern Ukraine and focus operations in the country's east and south, the Kremlin is struggling to scrape together enough combat-ready reinforcements to conduct a new phase of the war, say American and other Western military and intelligence officials.

Moscow initially sent 75% of its main ground combat forces into the war in February, Pentagon officials said. But much of that army of more than 150,000 troops is now a spent force, after suffering logistics problems, flagging morale and devastating casualties inflicted by stiffer-than-expected Ukrainian resistance, military and intelligence officials say.

There are relatively few fresh Russian troops to fill the breach. Russia has withdrawn the forces, as many as 40,000 soldiers, it had arrayed around Kyiv and Chernihiv, two cities in the north, to rearm and resupply in Russia and neighboring Belarus before most likely repositioning them in eastern Ukraine in the next few weeks, US officials say.

The speculation comes as thousands desperately try to flee Ukraine's eastern Donbas region as Russia intensifies its strikes there. The Luhansk regional governor has urged civilians to "evacuate while it is safe," predicting a larger Russian assault to come.

Millions are displaced, either finding refuge in Western countries, like Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova, or in shelters in cities where the situation is less dire, like Lviv.

The UN says the war has created more than 4.2 million Ukrainian refugees, mostly made up of the elderly, women and children.

## BUCHA & THE RUSSIAN WAR CRIMES

The whole world was shocked and saddened by the scenes that met them in Bucha, a town near Kyiv, as the images of dozens of brutally killed Ukrainians left in the streets were spread by Ukrainian forces who liberated the town. Reportedly, up to 300 civilian bodies were found on streets and in mass graves.

On Sunday, Ukraine accused the Russian forces of carrying out a massacre in Bucha, while Western nations reacted to images of dead locals with their hands tied behind their backs, by imposing new

sanctions against Moscow and Putin's family members.

Russia's defense ministry denied the Ukrainian allegations, saying the footage and photographs showing bodies in Bucha were "yet another provocation" and "staged" by the Ukrainian government.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for a Nuremberg-style tribunal to investigate and prosecute Russian war crimes. The US House voted overwhelmingly Wednesday night to call for an investigation of war crimes committed during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

## MARIUPOL & THE GROWING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Meanwhile, fighting and Russian airstrikes continue in the besieged eastern city of Mariupol, where aid agencies say the humanitarian crisis is worsening as some 160,000 residents have no access to water, power, heating or communication.

Some residents in the besieged city have died due to stress and hunger, and often it is not even possible to bury them. Instead, they are left in the buildings or the streets. As, despite several suggestions from Russia, which considers the occupation of the city vital due to its strategic location, Mariupol does not seem ready to surrender, and no-one can project how long these people will have to stay in such unbearable conditions for, "The city of heroic resistance" is how Mariupol has been named.

The humanitarian situation as a whole is dire. Up to 160 children are among the 1,563 civilians killed in Ukraine since Russia invaded its neighbor on February 24. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights adds that the real death toll in Ukraine is likely much higher, citing delayed reporting due to the armed conflict. Russian forces have shot and kill children and women without mercy, while dozens of women and minors are reported to have been raped and tortured.

As more and more devastating scenes evolve on the ground, the West is trying to increase its assistance, both militarily and economically.

"With the Biden administration sending dozens of armed drones to Ukraine, the Pentagon is training Ukrainian soldiers in the United States to use the weapons to attack Russian tanks and other armored vehicles," reports the NY Times.

"Russia still has forces available to outnumber Ukraine's, and Russia is now concentrating its military power on fewer lines of attack, but this does not mean that Russia will succeed in the east," Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, said on Monday.

"The next stage of this conflict may very well be protracted," Mr. Sullivan said. He added that Russia would probably send "tens of thousands of soldiers to the front line in Ukraine's east," and continue to rain rockets, missiles and mortars on Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Lviv and other cities.

# Pashinyan, Aliyev Agree to Peace Talks

Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev have agreed to start work on a peace treaty during a trilateral summit hosted by European Council President Charles Michel in Brussels.

Michel noted Pashinyan and Aliyev "stated a desire to move rapidly towards a peace agreement" in a statement released after the 4.5 hour meeting.

Each of the leaders will instruct the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of their respective countries to "work on the preparation of a future peace treaty, which would address all necessary issues."

The statement does not specify what those issues include.

Pashinyan and Aliyev also agreed to launch a Joint Border Commission to "delimit the bilateral border between Armenia and Azerbaijan" and "ensure a stable security situation along, and in the vicinity of, the borderline."




The joint commission is expected to be convened by the end of April.

"I am sure we have taken a very important step in the right direction today. It does not mean that everything is decided, it means that we have made progress,"

Michel was quoted as saying by azatun.am.

It is also unknown at this stage whether the Russian side will be involved in this process, which plays one of the main conciliatory roles between the parties.




## The English - Speaking Union

ინგლისურ ენაზე მოლაპარაკეთა კავშირი

Creating global understanding through English

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen  
President: HRH The Princess Anne



BANK OF GEORGIA  
Main Supporter

Invites 16-20 year old young speakers to take part in the

### Public Speaking Competition

The theme of the competition is "We expect too much from our heroes". Speakers may interpret this theme in any way they see fit, but they should not use the theme as their title. Each speaker will be allocated 5 minutes.

The competition will be held in three rounds. The first round, March 21, at the English Language Centre "British Corner".

The date and theme of the second round will be announced later.

The competition is sponsored by the Bank of Georgia.

Due to the pandemic the final of the competition in London will be held online.

The deadline for registration is March 15.

**Contact us:**  
"British Corner", Vake Park  
(entrance from I. Abashidze St.).  
Tel.: 032 226305, 591339993, E mail: [marinaesu@yahoo.com](mailto:marinaesu@yahoo.com); [britishcornerbc@gmail.com](mailto:britishcornerbc@gmail.com)  
[www.esugeorgia.com](http://www.esugeorgia.com) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnIKLMA7rBA>

# Our Planet, Our Health: Clean Our Air, Water and Food: UN Joint Statement on World Health Day 2022 (7 April)

**O**ur health and the health of our planet are inextricably linked. The imperative to focus on creating healthy societies on a healthy planet is crystal clear.

The 2022 World Health Day theme centers on the link between the health of our planet and the health of humans, animals, plants – all living creatures. Rising temperatures, floods and extreme rainfall are impacting the lives of millions of people, creating humanitarian emergencies, depriving people of homes and livelihoods and driving forced migration and displacement. Climate change will have a serious impact on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Heat worsens maternal and neonatal health outcomes, with research suggesting that an increase of one degree Celsius in the week before delivery corresponds with a six percent greater likelihood of still-birth. When a climate-related disaster strikes, women and girls are also at greater risk of gender-based violence.

At the same time, human-caused health threats like air pollution, ecosystem degradation, and the production and consumption of tobacco are exacerbating damage to our planet. Tens of thousands



of tons of extra medical waste from the response to the Covid-19 pandemic have put tremendous strain on health care waste management systems, threatening

human and environmental health. Global food security faces the most severe challenges in years. Food loss and waste, pests and diseases, natural disasters, loss

of biodiversity and habitat destruction, and conflict – are major impediments to meeting the world population's ever-growing food needs.

As Georgia strives to address the economic and social crisis brought on by the pandemic, World Health Day serves as a reminder that innovative ideas and new ways of working are needed to 'build back better'. We need to transform agri-food systems, promote sustainable agriculture, forestry and fishery practices, and make a systemic shift towards green energy and net-zero emissions. We need a world that is cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable.

Humans contribute to environmental degradation through unsustainable behavioural patterns. We must be part of the solution in addressing the single biggest health threat that humanity faces – the climate crisis.

The United Nations reaffirms its strong commitment to assisting Georgia to build a resilient and healthier society. On this World Health Day, we are calling on everyone to reimagine a world where clean air, water and food are available to all, where economies are focused on planetary and human health and well-being, where healthy, people-centred cities, villages and communities create conditions for people to lead better lives.

Let us all protect our health – and our planet. There is no Planet B.

## POLITICS

# Hypocrisy and Georgia's Place in the Clashing World



Demonstrations in support of Ukraine have taken place in Tbilisi and other Georgian cities since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24. Source: Rferl

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

**G**eorgia, today, is in the best possible spot within the world's geopolitical labyrinth it has been in the last 30-odd years. The chain of strategic bumbles this country has been through following the demise of the Soviet Union is still vibrant, effectively ramifying into other political errors. Fortunately, though, the habitual hot-headedness of our erstwhile governments has come to a long-cherished balanced end, not to mention the fact that the already learned people of Georgia know very well how to tell wrong from right,

and how to discern between black and white.

And yet, as if to uphold a tradition, the political opposition here continues to maintain their never-cooling-down hot heads, operating consistently in a hysterical fashion, hoping that screaming in front of the Government House and staging histrionics on the parliament floors will bring them back to power. There is nothing wrong with a change in the country's administration every now and then, but only for the better, not for the worse!

Georgia's current government has made it absolutely and unyieldingly clear that Georgia will never back the sanctions against Russia. This practically means that Sakartvelo no longer wishes to take

part in international conflicts, is not willing to send its young people to war, does not want to take sides, and has no desire to play geopolitical games that could very well work to its worst detriment. It is hardly comprehensible why this kind of stand is so bad that the opposition chooses to tear up its lungs in an attempt to prove the opposite and send the nation to another slaughterhouse.

I say, without a tinge of hesitation or remorse, that the life of one young Georgian that might potentially precreate other Georgian lives in the future, is much more valuable than anything else, even the fight for freedom and democracy, be it here or in any other part of the world. This country has lost so much to fighting for so many unlikely aims,

that it is high time for us to come to our senses and get our acts together so as to finally give peace to our good people so they can build their lives, rather than letting them fall to destruction, as has so often happened in the past.

It is deplorable to me to hear those high-pitched oppositional voices demanding we join the international sanctions against Russia and send humanitarian aid to the suffering Ukrainian people while, here in Georgia, one can hardly find a garbage bin in town without a hungry panhandler desperately scavenging within its putrid, foul-smelling depths for a morsel to eat. Yes, we are certainly willing and obligated to help other nations in trouble, but should we not remember as well our own poverty-stricken fellow citizens, those who have help neither from the government nor their own neighbors, as we all now so eagerly send off truckloads of food and utensils to lands beyond our borders? A fair balance between the two might work well, but even mentioning this thought publicly could trigger a rush of negative emotionality in our society. So, I simply suggest we remain internationally-minded world citizens, and at the same time, avoid hypocrisy.

I could humbly and respectfully go further and deeper into my poignant comments, describing the most active shouters of support for Ukrainians in their war effort. These are the Georgian men and women opposed to our governmental stand, who call for volunteer fighters to be sent to Ukraine, but when it comes to dispatching to war their own family members, they immediately change their mendacious bellicose slogans into a tone of the blatantly pacifistic. In a word, it is so egregiously clear that the oppositional forces are viciously thirsty and ready to drag Georgia into a war just to see new electoral opportunities emerge in their favor as a result.

No, we will not go to war! We will no longer lose our youth the upholder of

our national gene pool, who nourish us with hope that the Georgian nation will never be swept away from the surface of the earth. So, God be with us!



We are certainly willing and obligated to help other nations in trouble, but should we not remember as well our own poverty-stricken fellow citizens, those who have help neither from the government nor their own neighbors, as we all now so eagerly send off truckloads of food and utensils beyond our borders?

# Future of Russia and the South Caucasus

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

As signs of a tentative ceasefire emerge amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, several broad scenarios of future Russia can be discerned. The South Caucasus will be directly impacted heavily by whatever path Russia takes.

Russia is in a transitory period. It has now officially re-entered an imperial mode. The invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the subsequent occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, along with the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014, were still not seen as Russia bent on building a territorial empire. Many even mocked the idea when the Russian leadership was accused of rebuilding the Soviet Union.

The brutal war on Ukraine launched in February changes everything. Russia is now re-building an empire, and the idea of empire for the Russian political class is about controlling territory if it does not achieve Ukraine's and Belarus' near total alignment with Russian interests. This is what is happening, and the invasion of Ukraine will reshape Russia's future both internally and foreign policy wise in a most unprecedented way.

The most likely scenario is the emerging concept of "fortress Russia". Seen as besieged by the collective West, the Russian political elites will be witnessing the struggle exclusively through historical terms. European invasions of Russia in 18th-20th centuries will be regarded as a precursor to what Russia



Image source: caucasuswatch.de

is facing now through sanctions. This Russian thinking is both dangerous and incorrect in many ways; dangerous, because it brings Russia's near total isolation, which endangers the economic development the country has achieved since 2000s. In a way, Vladimir Putin's ability to rule was largely based on the social contract of him providing general stability and the population being relatively content as opposed to the chaos of the 1990s. Diluting this advantage will hit hard at the pillars of his and security apparatus' power.

Thus comes a long period of Russia's economic decline, but one where what I would call "de-Westernization" of Moscow's foreign policy will take place. The Kremlin will be increasingly detached from the collective West, with greater incentives to look to Asia. What could

have been seen as a positive development years or even months ago, after Ukraine, invasion Russia's Asian pivot will be a forced one, where Moscow will become ever more dependent on China, India and others.

Yet another alternative for Russia would be the pursuit of autarchy: not impossible, but an increasingly difficult task to carry out. Even then, however, the decline of Russia as a power will only accelerate. Autarchy would, however, mean a steep impoverishment and declining ability to project power abroad. Moreover, to carry out the autarchic scenario successfully would be impossible without establishing totalitarian control inside the country. Putin's rule has been increasingly repressive, but it has hardly reached the level the Soviets achieved in the 1930s-1950s. In other words, Russia has fewer resources,

and the government, be it Putin or his successors, wield less economic and military might to dominate as decidedly as the Soviets did the lives of ordinary people. Autarchy and isolation without total control over the population is an impossible task.

The third broad scenario could be Russia falling into chaos. Chaos is an integral element of Russian history. A series of crises resulting in a full breakdown of the entire edifice of the Russian state took place in the Rurik, Romanov and the Soviet periods. Those were followed by either relative or complete regeneration of Russian power, but it usually took decades to achieve. This cyclic history is peculiar to Russia, and we indeed might be entering a period of one such Russian decline. Or rather, we should see it as a continuation of the breakdown of Russian influence following the Soviet collapse. Yes, under Putin, Russia's power grew, but he did not change it fundamentally, rather merely slowing the process down. Over the long term, the period of 1991-2022 could be seen in the future as a continuous diminution of Russian prestige and power and the Russian political elite trying to reverse it by invading neighboring countries.

What could these scenarios mean for the South Caucasus? The highly fractured region where Russian influence is maintained exclusively through military instruments will feel firsthand the reverberations from Russian decline. The decline, however, will not necessarily mean rapid withdrawal of Russian forces. On the contrary, Moscow could exacerbate the security situation in the region in order to increase its relative position

vis-à-vis the collective West or the regional powers, Turkey and Iran.

Even if the contours of Russian withdrawal from the South Caucasus emerge, the drawdown will not be smooth. Too many conflicts would serve as a reminder of how Russia maintained control of the region and how it would strive to retain its major position.

These are broader scenarios of what might await the region amid the fundamental changes Russia is presently experiencing. And as all three South Caucasus states fear Russia's total victory in Ukraine, this could close the region to the collective West. Though poor, Russia will nevertheless be able to further isolate the Black and Caspian seas and the space in between. This explains why Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have been cautious in their approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Each state loathes Moscow's influence and fears what a victorious Russia could have in store for the region, yet there is little the three states could realistically do, as the West seems unwilling to commit militarily to the defense of the South Caucasus. The region is not as important as Ukraine, and much depends on what future relations between Washington and Ankara will be.

What is more troublesome for the South Caucasus is that whatever scenario discussed above develops in Russia, the downsides for the South Caucasus will almost always be bigger than the potential geopolitical benefits.

Emil Avdaliani is a professor at European University and the Director of Middle East Studies at Georgian think-tank, Geocase.

## Karnitschnig: Merkel's Decisions Led to this Disaster

Continued from page 1

"Merkel will probably leave this episode for her memoirs," Karnitschnig muses. "But one thing that's happened over the past couple of weeks is that her advisors have started bickering and blaming each other for Merkel's policies. Christoph Heusgen, her former foreign policy advisor and now the chairman of the Munich Security Conference, and Lars-Hendrick Roller, her chief economic advisor, are pointing fingers at each other, saying they weren't responsible for this policy.

**MERKEL ISN'T THE ONLY WESTERN LEADER TO HAVE A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH PUTIN - FRENCH PRESIDENT MACRON IS ON PHONE EVERY DAY PLEADING WITH HIM TO STOP THE WAR. AND YET, PUTIN PERSONALLY DENIED MACRON'S REQUEST FOR A FRENCH-LED HUMANITARIAN CORRIDOR IN MARIUPOL. GERMANY USED TO AND STILL GETS A LOT OF STICK FOR ITS RELUCTANCE TO BE TOUGHER ON PUTIN. SO, HOW SHOULD MACRON'S EFFORT BE RATED IN THAT REGARD?**

It's clear Macron is doing this partly because of the upcoming presidential elections in France. I don't think he's that cynical for that to be the only reason though - I think he does feel he is actually doing something to make a difference by continuing to engage Putin, but then again, he hasn't given anything away to him. He doesn't have the power to do so. The difference between what he's doing and what Merkel did for so long, is that Merkel wasn't just talking to Putin, she was making concessions along the way by allowing North Stream 2 to go ahead, for example, and by not imposing tougher sanctions on Russia after Crimea and the war in Donbas. Macron hasn't made any concessions like that to Putin. And considering the situation in Mariupol, his efforts to create a humanitarian corridor there are laudable. If that's the one thing that he could have achieved, these calls would have been worth it. So, yes, unfortunately, it hasn't worked out.

But I don't think that he should really be in the same company as Merkel.

**WHAT WILL THE EVENTS OF UKRAINE DO TO MERKEL'S LEGACY IN GERMANY AND ABROAD?**

Let me just preface this by saying I've always been somewhat more skeptical about Merkel's record than many of my colleagues, especially towards her foreign policy, not only because of the way she handled Ukraine but also because of the way she dealt with other crises, like Greece, for example. I don't think she'll have much of a legacy at all. I always thought that history would eventually take a very critical view of her time in office. And I think the war in Ukraine makes that absolutely clear now - even the German commentators who were very laudable towards Merkel in the past have woken up to the fact that her decisions led to this disaster. And it's not just a disaster for Ukraine, it really is a disaster for all of Europe. And I think a lot of it goes back to her policies, unfortunately.

**YOU MENTIONED OTHER CRISES - GEORGIA, NOT ONLY UKRAINE, ALSO HAS A SAY ON BOTH MERKEL AND STEINMEIER. HOW IMPACTFUL WAS 2008 AND THE BERLIN REFUSAL AT THE BUCHAREST SUMMIT?**

2008 was absolutely crucial. The Bucharest Summit was a hinge moment in history and, unfortunately, at that time, the decision didn't get as much attention in the West as it should have. The West was preoccupied with the tensions in the Middle East, so there was not much of a focus on Europe. The same can be said about the invasion of Georgia.

There was recently an interview with Merkel's former chief military advisor Erich Vad on German television, and he basically acknowledged that it was Merkel who was the main voice resisting giving the MAP to Georgians and Ukrainians. The French just went along with her, Sarkozy just tagged along. It's an unspoken consensus that if on international stage either France or Germany finds itself isolated, then the other will vote with them so it doesn't look like



I don't think Macron should really be in the same company as Merkel - Unlike Merkel, he hasn't made any concessions to Putin

they are isolated. I don't think this was an issue that Sarkozy felt particularly strongly about at the time, but to back up the Germans, he decided to join them. German resistance led to this. It's been documented that Bush tried to convince Merkel when she was in the United States, early in 2007. Yet, you can see the influence that Putin's speech in Munich 2007 had on her, as she sat right there in the front row. It must have really resonated with her.

Another important issue is German history and her East German roots, as she was someone who thought, like a lot of German politicians, that she could understand the Russians, while others, such as us, couldn't. That might be true to a certain degree, they do have more familiarity, but in this case it led her to make a fatal error. And everything that happened since sort of flows from that decision, and now, you have people in Germany saying, "Oh, well, if we had done it back then, if we had agreed to allow them a MAP, there would have been a war right away in Ukraine, and Russia would have attacked back then." We'll never know, obviously, but if you look at the performance of the Russian military in Georgia, and how disastrous that was, it's hard to imagine that that

they would have succeeded in in taking control of a country the size of Ukraine with the military they had at the time.

**HOW DURABLE IS THE GERMAN U-TURN, THIS ZEITWEENDE, GOING TO BE? WILL THE OLD BUSINESSLIKE APPROACH MAKE ITS RETURN ONCE HOSTILITIES ARE OVER?**

I don't think it is durable in the sense that I don't think that Germany can have a leadership role here, as long as the people who are in power now remain in power, because they are the same people who are responsible for these decisions. The Social Democrats for years backed all of the decisions that Merkel made, as members of her coalition, the so called grand coalition between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats. And Steinmeier, in particular, was the main architect of the Minsk deal, which was also a disaster. I don't think any of these people have much credibility. As recently as mid-December, Chancellor Scholz was arguing that Nord Stream 2 was a commercial project, repeating the exact talking points that Merkel used to say - that it doesn't have anything to do with geopolitics, that it's just a private sector matter. I just don't think that they have any credibility here, and it's going to be very difficult for them.

Germany has a lot to work on here - they made a big announcement, one made out of panic, because they saw that everything that they had been arguing for the past 20 years was false. They made all of these promises, but they have yet to fulfill them. They haven't spent 100 billion on defense, they're still debating the details of it. I think it might end up just as a U-turn in the rhetoric. But whether they actually follow through is another matter, and you're already seeing the cracks in that front, with people questioning "Do we really need to spend this much money?" and so on. It is important to remember that the 100 billion that they're talking about is something that they want to spend over four years. The question is, what happens after that? They're going to need to keep spending, because 100 billion, all that does is compensate for what they didn't do over the last decade plus. So it's not like you can

flip a switch: there are much deeper problems here. That is what is going to be very difficult for the Germans to resolve, because they don't have a security culture in the country, and that's why they don't understand a lot of what's happened here.

**AND THEN THERE IS THE RUSSIAN GAS ISSUE - WILL IT PERSIST WITH GERMANY?**

Yeah, that's not going anywhere. This is why Schultz is drawing the line, they're saying, "Well, we can't just switch off Russian gas overnight." They're talking about reducing their dependence on Russian gas by 50% by the end of the year, but I don't see that. It's a PR measure that they're throwing out there. Given their reliance on Russian gas and how they attached to it most of the German infrastructure, it's very difficult to wean yourself off that system. You know, they don't even have one LNG terminal, and they won't for a very long time. So the dependence on Russian gas is going to remain.

They're also saying they might be able to give up Russian oil, which is also very important to Germany. They might be able to cut that off, but there's no way they can do the same with gas - it's just too important for German industry. And the unfortunate irony is that critics and other observers, like myself have been saying for years "You have a fatal dependence on Russian energy!" and they always denied it. And now we're seeing it play out.



Matthew Karnitschnig, POLITICO's chief Europe correspondent

# How Do Russia's Shortcomings in Ukraine Affect the South Caucasus?



Two Georgian border guards at the occupation line between South Ossetia and Georgia. Photo by Paul Salopek

ANALYSIS BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Walking down the bustling streets on a cool Tbilisi morning, one can hardly ignore the abundance of Ukrainian flags and posters. Hanging from balconies, door fronts, and in shop displays, the citizens of Georgia have not been shy of their support for their Black Sea brethren. As Russian forces are required to retract from several failed assaults, recentering on more “important” targets, Ukraine has managed to buy itself some breathing room.

While the war is far from its closing point, the effects of the Kremlin's deci-



The developing situation in the South Caucasus may very well become a proverbial fork in the road for many of the players

sions have already begun to ripple through the South Caucasus. With the region already significantly affected by the Russian presence, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are all watching intently. Each nation, with their own separate yet interwoven relationship with the northern neighbor, will likely be reassessing their positioning in the region.

Of notable concern is the reviving tensions in the Nagorno-Karabakh territories. After the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan and a Russian-brokered ceasefire, a force of approximately 2000 Russian peacekeepers were deployed. Tasked with maintaining the ceasefire and the protection of civilians, several violations of that ceasefire and other small attacks against the population have occurred under their watch.

The peacekeeping force is led by Major General Mikhail Kosobokov, formerly the commander of the 7th Military Base in occupied Abkhazia. These forces have been stationed under his command primarily along the Lachin corridor, the main transportation route into Nagorno-Karabakh. This corridor has been the site of multiple attacks on both Armenian and Azerbaijani military and civilians, resulting in casualties for both sides.

Azerbaijan, likely sensing weakness on the part of the Russian military, has begun to make moves in the mountains of Nagorno-Karabakh. Sources on the ground reported advancing forces against Armenian defenders near the village of Farukh. The defenders fell back to a nearby friendly village, alerting the Russian peacekeeping authorities of the violation. In a video posted on social media, Russian military negotiators failed to reach any agreement with the Azer-

bajani command staff.

Following this, Russian peacekeeping forces were seen on several open source videos mobilizing in the area. In a series of photos released by the Armenian side, Russian armored vehicles and trucks had moved into positions to deter any further Azerbaijani incursion. The commander of the peacekeepers released a statement saying they would be investigating the incident.

With continuing material and training support from Turkey, Azerbaijan has long been emboldened to increase its territorial gains. Baku, seeing the region as a way to rapidly develop its energy exports, has stated its intentions. Last year, Azerbaijani President's Special Representative to Shusha Aydin Karimov said that the government had already allocated \$1.5 billion for “reconstruction of the liberated territories.”

In addition to education and health focused programs, they have openly said that a “green energy zone” is planned for Nagorno-Karabakh. By removing this additional weight on Azerbaijan's gas production, it is likely they will aim to fill the gap in Europe created as Russia is slowly removed as the primary supplier. The combined military and economic leverage in the region could clear the way for increased aggression against Armenia and further expansion.

On top of this looming threat, Armenia stands to lose more Russian support. The Kremlin has been slow to lend material support to the nation, leaving Armenia with underdeveloped defense equipment and technology. As Russia focuses the vast majority of its efforts to support and supply the offensive against Ukraine, Armenia is even more unlikely to receive

anything in the event of a renewed conflict.

Meanwhile, Georgia has attempted to play a neutral role as these waves around them continue. While Tbilisi has joined in the international sanctions after much popular pressure, it is only private organizations that have gone above this call for support. Several private companies have refused to ship products to Russia and an estimated 2000 volunteers have left to assist in the conflict, most notable of which is the Georgian National Legion.

However, it is unlikely that Georgia can maintain its desired neutrality in the situation. The de facto leadership in the occupied territory of Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) has indicated its desire to become a part of Russia. Some of the higher echelons of their government have opposed this, saying that Russia has already recognized their independence, something that they say was the original goal; nothing more. This rift has highlighted the potential fracturing inside the breakaway region's leadership structure.

Additionally, a significant portion of South Ossetian forces sent to fight alongside Russia in Ukraine have returned after allegedly having a very hostile interaction with their Russian commanders. According to sources close to the matter, South Ossetian forces were ordered on the offensive against heavily defended Ukrainian positions. The Ossetian troops decided to advance according to their doctrine and against the wishes of their Russian commander.

As a result, the commander refused to resupply and allow the soldiers to retrieve their fallen comrades. After coming to a head with threats of violence exchanged, many of the South Ossetians opted to leave for home. While the government publicly called for its people not to criticize the returning men, it is doubtful



It is unlikely that Georgia can maintain its desired neutrality in the situation

they will look on this souring of relations well. At the same time, the other rogue territory of Abkhazia has stated that they will not seek inclusion into the Russian Federation and also intend to remain separated from Tbilisi.

The developing situation in the South Caucasus may very well become a proverbial fork in the road for many of the players. Azerbaijan and Armenia still display the propensity for engaging in a re-ignition of war. Baku still calls for the “liberation” of further land in Nagorno-Karabakh and Yerevan digs in deeper, making the region a proverbial powder keg.

Georgia, with the decision before it, will likely face a split in popular opinion on how to move forward. Many will want a move towards the West, and further distance the country from Russian influences in the region. Some will also see Western decadence and meddling in Ukraine as unjust and irresponsible, as well as a cause for Russian intervention. The ripples of the war in Ukraine have reached the South Caucasus, and it will likely mean significant changes for all nations involved.



Russian peacekeeping forces deployed to the Nagorno-Karabakh region in response to Azerbaijani advances near Farukh. Source: Armenian Military Portal via Telegram

## Hartzell: Report on Association Agreement Helps MEPs to Assess the Situation in Georgia

BY ANA DUMBADZE

EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell says the report on the implementation of the Association Agreement published by the European Parliament “is not a product of the European Parliament, but it's written by the European Parliament Research Center and helps MEPs assess the situation in Georgia.”

The ambassador notes that the conclusions presented in the report belong to the authors, although many of the issues raised in the report, including political polarization, polarization in the media, questions about judicial reform, elections, and democratic institutions, were also raised by officials in Brussels.

Hartzell said it is clear that these are issues that will continue to be discussed with the Georgian authorities, as this is an important aspect of Georgia's application for EU

membership.

Hartzell added that he thinks the Commission will present a conclusion on the application soon.

The report commissioned by the European Parliament reads that since April 2020, Georgia has seriously backslid with respect to the basic democratic principles and key political commitments it made as part of the Association Agreement. The document assessing the implementation of the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia covers the period of 2020-2022.



# Kersti Kaljulaid: We Need to Admit that the European Reaction to Georgia Was Weak Enough to Cause What We Are Now Seeing. We Failed.



Former Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid visited Vladimir Putin in 2019. Source: kremlin/wikimedia

INTERVIEW WITH VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

I just want to make another call to all partners and allies. Let's support Ukrainians and give them the weapons they are asking for - as many as we can, as many as we have. Please, come forward. I think we are settling in for a relatively long period where we need to up our military spending and our military production anyway, so let's do it sooner rather than later, and let's give Ukraine all we can, - Former Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid told Radio Free Europe's Georgian service and the New Eastern Europe Magazine in a joint interview in which she offered her insights on the war in Ukraine, Putin, NATO and the need for stronger sanctions. Tipped to be among the frontrunners to succeed Jens Stoltenberg as the first-ever female NATO Secretary General, Kaljulaid has been on a diplomatic crusade over the latest two months to gather as much international support for Ukraine as possible.

Kersti Kaljulaid travelled to Moscow to meet President Putin back in 2019, had a working lunch with the man, and talked about Georgia and Ukraine. When criticized, she pressed the importance of leaving the dialogue channel open to Russia - a narrative that the French President is championing nowadays. We asked her if her views in this regard had changed.

"Obviously, we've all failed, but at that point in time for me it was very important, because I felt that every leader of Europe should take responsibility to talk even to the difficult neighbors, and that's what I did," she tells us. "Of course we failed, and badly. If we hadn't, there wouldn't be a war in Europe. And I think this old adage about talking from the position of strength might have actually born more fruit. Many of us are today thinking 'what if the sanctions of today had been put in place after Georgia's partial occupation?' Crying over spilt milk doesn't bring results, but we should admit that the European reaction to Georgia was weak enough to result in Crimea; then our reaction was stronger,

but still weak enough to cause what we are now seeing. So let's admit that we failed.

## SHOULDN'T THESE PAST HISTORY LESSONS AFFECT THE FUTURE THINKING OF THE WEST?

If we look at the history, and Russia is but the latest example of it, no autocrat who has had enough economic might has ever wasted a chance to use it as a geopolitical advantage. They burn with the desire to expand, to rule first the neighborhood, then the world. This is probably the strongest lesson we can learn - if there is an autocrat, then they will do these things, just because they can.

## IS THE WEST DOING ENOUGH FOR UKRAINE? YOU CLAIMED IN A RECENT INTERVIEW: "LET US ADMIT THAT EUROPE CANNOT MOVE FASTER THAN GERMANY AND FRANCE." IF THAT'S THE CASE, THINGS DON'T LOOK VERY GOOD FOR UKRAINE, WHICH NEEDS HELP "YESTERDAY."

Well, if you look at the people of Germany, then I would say this is extremely fast development compared to the discussions we were having at the Munich Security Conference [just before the war]. You cannot move quicker than your people, they should understand what you're doing. And now when Putin has made it very clear what the risk is and what he's ready to do, so the politicians have reacted. And the great thing is that the European citizens are strongly supportive of that, and maybe even demanding more. So I can only add my voice to these European citizens who say that we really need to win this war in Ukraine. And we must keep supplying the Ukrainian army. They have trained fighters, it is a big nation. But what they do need is to always be able to match every Russian tank with a rocket, they need stronger air defense capabilities too. We in Estonia have emptied our warehouses of all anti-tank ammunition, but we cannot help with air defense. There are obviously bigger European nations who have the necessary capa-

bilities - they need to step in. I do not want to sound ungrateful about what has been done, but I would encourage them to indeed do even more.

## I UNDERSTAND THAT LIKE MANY IN THE WEST, YOU TOO BELIEVE THAT PUTIN MISCALCULATED IN UKRAINE OR THAT HE IS LACKING INFORMATION OR THAT HIS ADVISORS ARE MISLEADING HIM - CAN THESE MISCALCULATIONS LOSE HIM THE WAR?

"Technically, he lost this war before it started. Putin needed 70,000 to hold Grozny. And he had less than 200,000 to roll over Ukraine," Kaljulaid notes. "But his [main] miscalculation was not military. His miscalculation was based on something he believes in - he sincerely is the kind of man who believes that people are passive. And that it's only the West that is expanding its sphere of influence. People, and their choices, can be disregarded. He thought that Ukrainian people facing the spring would not care under whose presidency the potatoes get into the soil and the wheat gets planted and so on. And it is to his surprise the Ukrainian people actually do care, because people value freedom. For him, people are just passive objects and this is where his big miscalculation was because I'm quite sure he didn't think Ukrainians would fight the way they are fighting," she tells us.

We next point out that even if we accept that Putin miscalculated, and if the Istanbul talks are anything to go by, Putin is set to get a neutrality status from Ukraine, which Kyiv was unwilling to consider before the war, ensuring that Ukraine won't get into NATO. He also has more land than he had before February 24, including lands that contain Europe's second-largest known reserves of natural gas (after Norway's). He is also close to establishing uncontested control over the Azov Sea coastline and getting land-bridge access to Crimea. All this at the cost of more than 10,000 dead Russian soldiers, true, but that is something he seems to be perfectly content to pay, alongside the economic sanctions, at least a part of which he will probably

demand should be lifted if a ceasefire is to be agreed upon. In addition, it has boosted his popularity at home and he would probably find a way to sell it to his brainwashed domestic electorate as a victory. So, we ask, in realpolitik terms, who's the real loser here?

"Us?" Kaljulaid suggests. "And you know, you forgot some elements - Belarus, for example. We hear some noises from Ossetia and Abkhazia, too. But I will say that first and foremost, it is for Ukraine and President Zelensky to decide on which terms they are ready to start discussing. It is for him to say. We cannot tell him - this is now a situation where you should stop fighting. We cannot force him to continue fighting, if he says he's ready to negotiate. Yes, if these negotiations end with Russia having more land and more hold over Europe, then I think it is encouragement [for Putin]. Therefore, whichever way the ceasefire agreement goes, we should not remove the sanctions. Crimea is occupied, part of Georgia is occupied, so the sanctions should remain. This is in our hands - it's up to us to deal with the sanctions, as it is up to us to provide Ukraine with the necessary weaponry, which they are asking.

## AS MUCH AS I ADMIRE YOUR PRINCIPLED POSITION ON SANCTIONS, DO YOU THINK IT WILL BE SHARED BY YOUR COLLEAGUES IN BERLIN AND PARIS AND FURTHER WEST?

Well, first and foremost, I am a president who is not in office anymore. So, by definition, you cannot compare me to the decisions which, for example, Chancellor Scholz has to take. But frankly speaking, stronger sanctions is something that is in our hands and something which we can do. And you know what? The counter-sanctions that Russia has imposed in response to our sanctions on Crimea, they have hurt the Estonian agriculture and economy. We are neighbors with Russia, and we suffered quite a lot because of it. But we have never said: this is too high an economic burden. And I'm asking our Western partners - look what's going on in Mariupol. Is it really, truly, too high an economic burden which we'll have to bear? I don't think it is.

## AND BACK TO PUTIN - HIS APPROVAL RATING HAS SOARED SINCE THE WAR KICKED OFF - TO A STAGGERING 83%, ACCORDING TO THE LEVADA CENTER, DECLARED A FOREIGN AGENT IN RUSSIA. WITH THIS IN MIND, WHY DOES MOST OF THE WEST STILL REFER TO THIS AS "PUTIN'S WAR ON UKRAINE" AND NOT RUSSIA'S?

Indeed, I'm sure that quite a high proportion of Russian people do believe what Putin is telling them. Quite a lot, obviously. When I was a child, if somebody asked me about Lenin, or the Communist Party, or did I know that Estonia is occupied, I knew all the right answers given to me in school. But did I believe that even at the age of four? Never. I'm quite sure that many people in Russia, even if they don't share Putin's opinion, are not ready to voice it to whomever is asking, even to their own. You don't trust anybody in such a situation. In the 80s, if a foreign journalist had asked me something, I would have known to keep my mouth shut, knowing what it would mean for my family the next day. So whatever [data] comes out of that country right now, even if it's put together by well-meaning, independent people, it doesn't reflect the truth.

## IF, AND I UNDERSTAND THAT'S A BIG IF, PUTIN ISN'T DETERRED IN UKRAINE, HOW TANGIBLE WOULD THE THREAT BE FOR THE BALTIC COUNTRIES?

## WHAT WOULD HIS NEXT TARGET BE, DO YOU THINK?

It's very hard to say, but at least on February 26, when, unfortunately for them and to the delight of everyone else, they accidentally released a victory celebration article on Rianovosti, one sentence caught my attention: "If we hadn't brought Ukraine back to 'Russki Mir' now, then we would have had to go and seek them out from the Trans-Atlantic Union," which says that, at least in February, Russia was thinking that military action against NATO was unthinkable. Let's hope they will stick to this position. But hope is not what NATO is run on: NATO runs on risk analysis and visibility, and then it prepares accordingly. NATO is now fortifying its presence in the Baltic states, in Poland. NATO's deterrence levels have always been according to the risk pattern, and we see them now changing. So while I see the risks, obviously, we are not worried because NATO is taking the necessary steps. And of course, we will keep negotiating that these steps are strong enough, visible enough to make sure they stick to the position of February 26. But what is also interesting is that some people tend to believe that Putin is [doing it] because he is really afraid of NATO. I mean, look what's going on behind NATO's borders, there's nothing, so he's lying. He's never been afraid of NATO.

## THAT ALSO NARROWS THE LIST OF POTENTIAL TARGETS, AND MOLDOVA AND GEORGIA DO NOT FIND THEMSELVES IN THE MOST IDEAL OF POSITIONS. SHOULD THEY BE WORRIED?

Indeed, we should really, really be helping Moldova and Georgia, our Eastern partners who want to come closer to Europe, to help them advance. We should offer them a program that helps them with accession to the European Union. This is what we can do for all these countries to demonstrate to Putin that we are not afraid to move, to make big geopolitical steps, taking into account the will of those people - Moldovans, Georgians, Ukrainians. If they are willing, we should offer them help to come closer. But indeed, Moldova [should be worried] by definition, because of what happened to Georgia and Ukraine - when they turned their back on Russia and face to Europe, this is when Russia hurt them. So we have to be aware of these risks.

## ONCE IT'S ALL OVER, CAN PUTIN RE-ENTER THE POLITICAL HIGH ECHELONS OF EUROPE? OR IS IT A PR "GAME-OVER" FOR THE KREMLIN?

I sincerely hope that the scenes that we have seen in Ukraine over the latest days will deter any debate whatsoever about returning to "business as usual", be it in business or politics. I mean, it can't be possible. We must remember these dead children, dead civilians, destroyed cities. I cannot see a way back for Putin. It shouldn't even be offered.

## FINALLY, IT'S WIDELY REPORTED THAT YOU'RE BEING CONSIDERED FOR THE SOON-TO-BE-VACANT NATO SECRETARY GENERAL JOB. IS THAT SOMETHING YOU'D WANT TO TAKE ON?

Well, this is not up for discussion at all right now: Jens Stoltenberg's mandate has been wisely prolonged for a year, and I think we should not speculate about these things. Stoltenberg is somebody whose work I greatly admire, he's managed to feel very close to each and every ally, and he's also a great negotiator. I really admire what he is doing so let's not discuss this future head of the NATO right now. I'm very, very happy with Jens.

# The World Standing by Ukraine: Accusations and Sanctions



Image source: cnn.com

BY KETEVAN SKHIRTADZE

**T**he President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, stated in a video address this week that he had signed a decree recalling the Ukrainian Ambassadors from Georgia and Morocco. "There are people who work with others to protect the state so that Ukraine can choose its future. We appreciate the actions of such persons. There are those who think only of staying where they are. I signed today a decree calling back the Ambassador from Morocco. The Ambassador from Georgia is also being recalled. With great respect: If there are no weapons, sanctions, restrictions for

Russian business, please look for another job," Zelenskyy said.

The Georgian side responded to the decision of Zelenskyy by noting: "The steps we have seen from the Ukrainian authorities are even more illogical. Of course, we understand that the Ukrainian authorities are in a difficult state of war, but this situation does not justify the steps that I can say directly are an insult to the Georgian state. There is no logical explanation," stated Irakli Kobakhidze, the head of the ruling Georgian Dream party, adding their support for Ukraine was unwavering on all international platforms where political support was discussed, be it the Council of Europe, the UN, the OSCE, the Hague Tribunal or any other platform. He noted they were "doing their best to provide polit-

ical support to Ukraine."

As for international reactions to the ongoing war, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg says Russian troops are moving and not withdrawing; that they are regrouping. He said additional attacks on Ukrainian cities could be expected.

"According to our intelligence, the Russian units are not retreating but moving. Russia is trying to regroup, supply, and intensify its attack in the Donbas region. At the same time, Russia continues to put pressure on Kyiv and other cities. Accordingly, we may expect additional attacks, which will bring even more suffering," Stoltenberg said.

On March 29, Russia claimed it would reduce its attacks on Ukraine as delegates from the two countries met for their latest face-to-face peace talks in Istanbul.

Moscow said it would reduce its military activity near Ukraine's capital of Kyiv and the northern city of Chernihiv, though Russia has not followed through on similar pledges in the past.

## MORE SANCTIONS

The EU is finalizing the fifth package of sanctions against Russia, European Commission Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis told a press conference after the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN).

"This is the EU's response to the Bucha massacre, Russia's latest atrocities and its callous attitude to non-combatants – innocent civilians, that have shocked the world," he said, adding that the EU would continue to ramp the sanctions up as long as Russia continues its aggression.

He also said that EU countries should coordinate and work together, including with the EU's global partners, "to make sure that sanctions are properly and quickly enforced, and not circumvented."

"Any loophole should be closed off, quickly and firmly. Sanctions that exist only on paper are just that – paper. We want sanctions to continue biting Putin's regime hard in the real world," said Dombrovskis.

## ZELENSKY SPEAKS AT THE GRAMMY AWARDS

One of the highlights of the week was Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address to participants at the 64th annual Grammy Awards, asking them to speak out and tell the truth about this war.

"The war. What's more opposite to music? The silence of ruined cities and the dead. Our children draw swooping rockets, not shooting stars. Over 400 children have been injured and 153 killed, we'll never see them drawing. Our parents are happy to wake up in the morning – in bomb shelters, but alive. Our loved ones don't know if we will be together again. The war does not let us choose who survives and who stays in eternal silence," Zelenskyy said.

He added that their musicians wear body armor instead of tuxedos. They sing to the wounded in hospitals – even to those who can't hear them.

"But the music will break through anyway. We defend our freedom to live, to love, and to hear. On our land, we are fighting Russia, which brings horrible silence with its bombs – dead silence. Fill the silence with your music. Tell the truth about this war on your social networks, on TV," Zelenskyy stated.



Ukrainian servicemen attach a cable to the body of a civilian while checking for booby traps in the formerly Russian-occupied Kyiv suburb of Bucha, Ukraine, April 2, 2022. Source: AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda

# Georgian Dream MP Giorgi Khelashvili on the Accusations against Them

Continued from page 2

Let's just look at what Georgia is doing to support Ukraine. We are part of the international financial sanctions that are imposed by SWIFT and so on and so on... And you know that Georgia was the initiator, participant, and cosponsor of quite a few international measures in international organizations, from the UN general assembly to the international criminal court to the Council of Europe, and so on, that effectively sanctioned Russia in terms of international law for its behavior against Ukraine. And Georgia did not hesitate to join the international community in condemning as much as possible and emphasizing the need to limit Russian aggression.

## IT'S QUITE CLEAR THAT GEORGIA CAN'T AFFORD TO JOIN THE SANCTIONS, BUT ISN'T "GEORGIAN DREAM" RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT?

I don't think that Georgian trade with Russia has grown extraordinarily, quite the opposite – If you look at the most essential part of Georgian's needs, which is energy security, precisely under the

"Georgian Dream", Georgia dramatically diminished our dependence on Russian energy. The same can be said about many other things. Especially after signing the DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area) agreement with the European Union, we are doing our best to reorient Georgian businesses to the European markets. There is one segment that dramatically increased its market in Russia and that's wine production, which was sanctioned before but then Georgian wine regained the market. The government always encouraged winemakers, precisely because of security risks, to reorient their production to the European market, but it's a very slow process. It will take ages and ages for Georgian winemakers to find their niche there, explore these markets, and raise awareness about Georgian wine. So, I think many winemakers just opted for the easy way, which was the Russian way. I think this will be a good lesson for them that the easiest doesn't always mean the most secure.

## AVOIDING SENDING VOLUNTEER TROOPS TO

## UKRAINE WAS EXPLAINED BY AN "INEVITABLE CONFRONTATION" WITH RUSSIA, BUT ASKING FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU IS NOT. COULD YOU EXPLAIN THAT?

Sending volunteers to Ukraine is an issue that is regulated by international law. No government can deliberately organize and send volunteers, which would make any country that does so reconsidered as party to the conflict, as a belligerent. Georgian volunteers are there in Ukraine, fighting, even a member of Parliament, so this was yet another overblown criticism towards the government, because the government did not organize a chartered flight for volunteers to go to Ukraine, that would have amounted to direct participation in the conflict.

As for the European Union, it's very easy and clear – We have it in our constitution. It was the Georgian Dream that came up with this idea to include membership in NATO and membership of the European Union, as constitutional principles. We are simply abiding by what the Constitution tells us, irrespec-

tive of what potential complications can come. We already made a pledge to apply to the European Union by 2024. Neither Ukraine nor Moldova ever set a date for application. In our case, the decision was much easier. It was simply moving the date two years earlier for the application. But also, what we thought about was an interesting development in the West, in the European Union, that now the West is much more coherent about Russia, about Ukraine, about the need for unity, and at the same time, I think there is this growing awareness of the fact that delaying the membership, either of NATO or of the EU, is counterproductive. With these political and legal circumstances, we decided to expedite the process. There is something that one would call a red line: our membership is a national course, it's rooted in our history and our identity and therefore it can't be changed.

## IF RUSSIA ATTACKS GEORGIA, WILL IT BE CORRECT TO SAY – THE "GEORGIAN DREAM" COULD NOT AVOID THE WAR?

I think every historical circumstance is very different and I would not compare

this massive Russian aggression to what happened in 2008, I think that was an isolated case, even if it was the harbinger of the things to come. We never said that it was Saakashvili's fault what happened, but rather noted that the handling of the conflict and its aftermath was quite poor on the part of the government. Especially handling the war, the refugees, and internally displaced persons, the effort to secure the population, and to inform strategic communications was almost nonexistent. Many government members fled the country. Overall, there are things that you cannot avoid and then there are things avoidable and I would just repeat what I said in the beginning that every historic episode is unique, so you just can't make analogies and compare. So I wouldn't go as far as comparing 2008 with what is happening now in Ukraine, or what God forbid may happen in Georgia.

This interview was recorded on March 19.

Watch the interview here: <https://georgiatoday.ge/gt-interview-with-giorgi-khelashvili>

# Making Cybersecurity Education a Priority – IDI and the Embassy of Israel Work to Raise Awareness

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY  
KATIE RUTH DAVIES

In recent years, Georgia has fallen victim to repeated, hostile cyberattacks on government installations and services, as well as private commercial entities, - says Ambassador to Israel Ran Gidor. "Moreover, the current war in Ukraine has demonstrated once again the critical importance of developing a comprehensive cyber-security strategy, supported by cutting-edge capabilities. Israel is acknowledged to be a global leader in that sphere and has been supporting the emerging Georgian cyber ecosystem for several years now."

In March, a webinar was held that focused on the crucial need for providing proper educational tools on all levels.

"The event formed yet another modest but important link in our effort to raise awareness, attract young talent and lay down the foundations for Georgia's cyber-security protective shield," the Ambassador tells GEORGIA TODAY.

To find out more, we spoke to Neli Odishvili, the CEO of Internet Development Initiative.

"IDI was established in 2015. The idea and initiative of creating the organization belongs to Vladimer Svanadze, who currently holds the position of chairman of the board," Neli tells us. "The concomitant creed of the organization is to support the growth concentration of cyberspace, promote the involvement of cybersecurity standards, analyze threats, and write recommendations for both the government and private sectors. Inspired by the idea of raising public awareness, IDI is organizing conferences, seminars and forums in ICT and cybersecurity. We encourage the process of enhancing

acknowledgment related to information and communication technologies, innovations, internet governance and digital policies. As the CEO of Internet Development Initiative, it is a great honor for me to be comprehensively involved in the conceptual process of projects management. Passionately forming and positioning IDI as an organization with a strong identity on an irreversible path toward future empowerment is my professional pathos."

## WHAT ARE GEORGIA'S SPECIFIC NEEDS/WEAKNESSES, AND HOW HAS IDI HELPED GEORGIA SO FAR?

An insufficient number of specialists can be considered a major weakness for Georgia, considering the fact that in this era of rapidly progressing technologies, it is becoming vital to expand awareness of how technology and the internet are shaping the way we interact as individuals. IDI is constantly striving to capture and implement best international practices to encourage the evolution of an innovative ecosystem in Georgia. We are actively cooperating with a number of international organizations and large internet corporations, such as ICANN, with the support of which influential trainings such as DNS Abuse and DNS-SEC were conducted for Georgian law enforcement agencies and private companies.

The cooperation between IDI and the Embassy of Israel to Georgia should be boldly emphasized. As part of the sponsorship and general partnership with the Embassy of Israel to Georgia, and especially with the Ambassador of Israel to Georgia, Mr. Ran Gidor, IDI implemented the Israel-Georgia School of Digital Culture. In its sophisticated dimensions and contextual idea, it is a comprehensive collaborative project with the main idea



of providing young Georgian thought leaders with the best possible information, and raising their awareness of global digital processes. The School of Digital Culture empowers talented individuals to be at their best, to create and collaborate, to do great work, and to grow in their cutting-edge roles.

Another clear example of strong cooperation with the Embassy of Israel to Georgia is the implementation of a B2B meeting between Israeli and Georgian IT companies in the framework of IDI's cooperation with the Embassy and the Israel Export Institute.

"CyberStellar," an initial online publication in Georgia dedicated to innovations, technologies and digital empowerment, as well as the original online/radio transition "CyberTalk," are creative works of IDI.

Additionally, I want to mention the International Festival of Cybersecurity which is implemented annually by IDI, together with international and local partners.

In 2016, the first Georgian Internet Governance Forum GeoIGF was held on the initiative of Vladimer Svanadze, the founder of IDI.

## WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE EXPECTATIONS IN TERMS OF CYBER SECURITY IN GEORGIA AND THE REGION? WHAT THREATS DOES IT FACE AND HOW WILL IT OVERCOME THEM?

Last year was very interesting in terms of the country's cybersecurity. In particular, changes were made to the information security law, the third strategy was approved, the subjects of the new critically important information system were determined, which also included the private sector. In fact, it can be said that the country's cybersecurity is entering a new era, although the country already had good experience in this regard when in 2017 it received a good rating in international cyber security indices.

Russia remains as a threat, which also is reflected in the third cybersecurity strategy of Georgia. Both external and internal threats can be considered as a risk as well.

A comprehensive approach to addressing cyber security threats and challenges is important. The active involvement of the state and civil society, as well as the private sector, in the analysis of the problem and the search for solutions remains as a key factor.

## TELL US ABOUT THE WEBINAR. WHO WAS IT FOR AND WHAT WAS ACHIEVED?

The title of the webinar was Cybersecurity Education. It was implemented within cooperation between Internet Development Initiative and CyBureau - The Institute for Cyber Policy Studies. We brought together leading specialists working in this field from Georgia, Israel and Poland. During the webinar, they discussed the Cybersecurity Education Ecosystem, Cyber Awareness and Cyber Commitment, Digital Citizenship, how to bring cyber education to all levels in the organization, and more.

Advancement in technologies promotes an evolved society that embraces innovation and inventions; however, directly proportional to this advancement, a cybersecurity knowledge gap is becoming exceedingly clear.

The aim of the webinar was to express the need for educational institutions to make cybersecurity education a priority. We need to focus adequate efforts on training and preparing students to enter the cybersecurity workforce, we also need to realize that regardless of their future career, they should begin caring about their personal cybersecurity the moment they begin using devices. We must develop programs that support students in understanding their personal cybersecurity and privacy issues. To ensure cybersecurity awareness and knowledge, internet users and young individuals need to get educated on how to operate safely in cyberspace. This

education will guarantee that they understand how to protect themselves from cyberthreats. Internet Development Initiative will actively continue to pursue educational projects and make efforts to help Georgians discover and develop new opportunities.

An insufficient number of specialists can be considered a major weakness for Georgia, considering the fact that in this era of rapidly progressing technologies, it is becoming vital to expand awareness of how technology and the internet are shaping the way we interact as individuals

**CYBER SECURITY EDUCATION**

Cyber security education is an integral part of technology education. It is aimed at raising awareness about online threats and teaching methods of protection against them.

**CYBUREAU**  
The Institute for Cyber Policy Studies

**INTERNET DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**  
Solution of obstacles related to Cyber Security

**21 MARCH 2022**  
14:00 PM ISRAEL TIME  
16:00 PM TBILISI TIME  
ONLINE SEMINAR

**WE INVITE ALL INTERESTED INDIVIDUALS TO ATTEND THE SEMINAR**



# Caritas Czech Republic Supports Rural Doctors in Alpine Zone

BY NINA KOPALEISHVILI

**K**hatuna Gurgenidze, 47, has been working as a family doctor in Gudamakari Gorge, located in Dusheti Municipality, for 23 years. Despite the unusual geographical conditions of the highland region, and its severe climate, Khatuna visits patients using her own car, and provides medical services on the spot. Within the framework of the Czech Development Agency-funded project, Caritas Czech Republic is working on capacity-building for Khatuna and her colleagues, and is introducing electronic information systems to make the work of rural doctors easier and more efficient.

## DIFFICULTIES OF DOCTORING IN MOUNTAINOUS GUDAMAKARI

Khatuna Gurgenidze has been working as a family doctor at the Gudamakari ambulatory in Dusheti Municipality for twenty-three years. Her childhood memories are associated with the small town of Ananuri of the same municipality, where she grew up in her grandmother's house. Later, she graduated from the medical university in the capital and in 1999 returned to Dusheti to help the patients of her home region. Khatuna is a mother of three and a distinguished doctor of Gudamakari Gorge.

Khatuna serves a total of 580 patients, 80% of whom are elderly. As Dusheti

municipality is located in the highland Mtskheta-Mtianeti region with hard geographical conditions and a severe climate, these people find it especially difficult to get to the rural ambulatory.

"Totally, I serve patients of 24 villages, which are many kilometers away from each other, so we have to visit and provide services to our patients at home. I often use my off-road vehicle to drive to their houses as our medical facility does not have its own. We often have to travel to the alpine zone - of course, we can not ignore patients' requests, can we?! Our visits help them a lot, even in the cases when there is nothing serious to worry about".

## CARITAS CZECH REPUBLIC IMPROVES THE QUALITY OF PHC SERVICES IN GEORGIA

Khatuna tells us that considering the hard working conditions, the support from the Caritas Czech Republic to improve the quality of primary healthcare services is an important step forward, both in terms of capacity-building of rural doctors and the number of recovered patients. Thanks to funding from the Czech Development Agency, Caritas Czech Republic works in all sixteen rural ambulatories in Dusheti Municipality to improve the quality of healthcare services.

Specifically, Caritas Czech Republic provided training sessions for the doctors on updated clinical protocols on the management of non-communicable diseases, which made a significant contribution to Khatuna's and her colleagues' professional development:



"The training sessions provided by Caritas Czech Republic have made it much easier to manage diseases like hypertension and diabetes, and have helped us improve the condition of patients," she says. "Sometimes, patients find it difficult to decide whether to start medical treatment or not, but capacity building and supportive supervision provided by Caritas Czech Republic have also taught us how to convince them to make the right decision."

Moreover, Caritas Czech Republic also introduces electronic systems to rural doctors that have simplified their daily medical practice. Khatuna says that the introduction of an electronic medical records system is one of the important steps to simplify rural doctors' medical practice in Dusheti municipality. She notes that working on paper-based medical records is no longer required, as electronic records from previous exam-

inations are easily viewed in the unified electronic management information system. She says she values a lot the support of Caritas Czech Republic during the Covid-19 pandemic and states that the provided trainings greatly helped her to handle local cases of Covid-19.

Rusudan Chkhubianishvili, Caritas Czech Republic's project manager, notes that through the project, our organization provides significant support to the Government of Georgia:

"Individual work with medical staff and on-the-job training is a novelty in the Georgian reality, and aims to provide evidence-based medical information to rural doctors and nurses, who have not been able to update it and who rely on their diligence and efforts to obtain reliable and valid information on the management of common diseases and their prevention approaches."

Caritas Czech Republic is working to improve the quality of primary healthcare services in Georgia with the financial

support of the Czech Development Agency. Project activities include introducing updated clinical protocols for family doctors, developing and implementing IT solutions nationwide, updating the standards and requirements for primary healthcare staff qualifications, and establishing a continuing medical education system for primary healthcare in Georgia.

This material was prepared in the scope of the project financed within the Official Development Assistance of the Czech Republic and implemented through the partnership between Czech Development Agency and Caritas Czech Republic.



# Georgia to Give Forest Management a Boost

**A** new contribution of over \$920,000 has been made by Japan to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Georgia to fund the implementation of the country's climate action plans.

Japan's contribution will support UNDP's work on the transition to sustainable and climate-friendly forest management, aiming to protect forests from degradation and unsustainable logging, and increase their capacity to capture greenhouse gas emissions.

UNDP will also implement a pilot initiative in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region to engage local communities in sustainable forest management, create easy access to renewable energy sources, and assist 43,000 people to explore environment-friendly solutions that boost employment and create sustainable livelihoods.

The new partnership for climate action was launched on April 7 by visiting UN Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP Assistant Administrator, Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS (RBEC), Mirjana Špoljaric Egger, Ambassador of Japan to Georgia Imamura Akira and Georgia's Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture Nino Tandilashvili.

"Sustainable development is built on

sustainable livelihoods. It offers people a means of making a living that does not lead to environmental degradation. Georgia is one of 23 countries and territories worldwide to join a UNDP-Japan partnership that contributes to our ambitious Climate Promise initiative and helps translate national climate pledges into high-impact action on the ground," Špoljaric Egger said.

"Japan has set out an ambitious plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. As we pursue our national decarbonization goals, we also contribute to UNDP's Climate Promise initiative and support countries to build low-carbon economies and bring about green economic growth," Ambassador Imamura remarked. "The unique and rich forests of Georgia are vital, for environmental disaster prevention, apart from the economic development. At the same time, forests have a deeply meaningful connection to Georgia's culture. We are happy to further build upon our history of partnership in human security and sustainable development in Georgia, helping safeguard forest ecosystems and assisting 43,000 people to explore green energy solutions for sustainable livelihoods."

"It is our priority to introduce tools and mechanisms that blend environmental protection with economic benefits, like

the increase in employment and incomes," Deputy Minister Tandilashvili explained. "We thank our international partners for supporting sustainable development in Georgia. We also welcome that Georgia is one of the countries where Japan and UNDP are assisting to introduce sustainable solutions for forest management and protect ecosystems from the adverse effects of climate change. The Government of Georgia made an ambitious pledge to the Paris Agreement. This new initiative contributes to the fulfillment of these international obligations."

In its revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), Georgia committed to unconditionally reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 35 percent below the 1990 baseline level (an approximately 16 percent per capita reduction) by 2030. Georgia's National Climate Change Strategy 2030 and its Action Plan 2021-2023, adopted by the Government at the same time as the NDC, outline the concrete actions the country will take to achieve these goals. Introducing sustainable forest management practices to reach a 10 percent increase in forest carbon capture capacity by 2030 from 2015 levels is part of this ambitious agenda.

At COP26, UNDP launched the next phase of the Climate Promise - From Pledge to Impact - scaling up its support



to turn NDC targets into concrete action in at least 100 countries. Japan becomes the largest supporter of this phase of the pioneering and groundbreaking initiative, joining the longstanding funding partners Germany, Sweden, EU, Spain,

Italy, as well as the new funding partners UK, Belgium, Iceland, and Portugal to accelerate these efforts.

More information about the Climate Promise can be found at [climatepromise.undp.org](https://climatepromise.undp.org)

# SIT and Jacobs University Bremen Present a Career-Oriented Master in Computer Science and Software Engineering Program



**S**IT is a global institution dedicated to promoting Science, Education and Technology. Headquartered in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, SIT is a growing ecosystem comprised of education and research as well as commercial technology spin-offs, consulting services, and investment funds.

Thanks to its two English-language campuses in Bremen, Germany and in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, SIT offers interdisciplinary university programs to students from around the globe with flexible learning models, both online and on-site. With research and entrepreneurial mentality at its core, the SIT education ecosystem is a gateway to decisive careers in Technology and Sciences.

Jacobs University Bremen is a place

with a comprehensive range of BSc, MSc, and PhD programs that grant the qualifications required to work in any country in the much-needed careers of our digitalized world. Each student benefits from a well-organized campus life and powerful synergies with SIT research and the business ecosystem.

A key distinction of the SIT Swiss campus is research excellence at the highest international level in Advanced Software Engineering and its unique MSc program preparing future technology leaders.

The Schaffhausen Institute of Technology (SIT) and Jacobs University Bremen provide students with an enriched Master program to respond to the most in-demand jobs in tech, science and business science and launches the annual programming contest for full tuition-paid admittance to the program.

The new Master program in Computer Science and Software Engineering (MSc CSSE) is offered at both locations: Schaffhausen in Switzerland and Bremen in Germany. The MSc CSSE provides state-of-the-art knowledge at the intersection of quantum computing, intelligent autonomous systems, symbolic artificial intelligence, system security and advances in software engineering.

The shared interdisciplinary vision of SIT and Jacobs University Bremen complements the learning of technical knowledge through deep understanding and digital perspectives of leadership, entrepreneurship, business, psychology, life science, organizational psychology and transformational change management. The program includes mandatory courses but allows students to choose electives in three current areas: software engi-

neering, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence.

Students are free to choose their place of study - Schaffhausen or Bremen.

Full scholarships, covering tuition fees, and financial options, are available to students. Through SIT and the JUBSTAR Contest, an annual online programming contest, several students will receive full tuition-paid admittance to the master program. This year's contest will be held on April 26, and will include a practice round open to all on April 16 - 24. To enter the contest, participants can visit: <https://web.sit.org/star-contest-2022>

The program development team is led by Peter Zaspel, Professor of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering at Jacobs University, and Mauro Pezzè, Program Director at SIT and is available to undergraduate students with strong knowledge pertaining to Computer Science disciplines. The MSc CSSE graduates will complete their studies with a master thesis. The application deadline is June 1, 2022 or July 15 for those who

don't need a visa.

The objective of the MSc CSSE is to educate and equip future leaders in research and industry, and the development of creative and constructive skills to produce, develop, and evaluate solutions to technical challenges. The program is designed to increase students' knowledge in specific areas and enable them to master the skills needed to approach, develop, document and manage research projects. Furthermore, the vast wealth of resources and international network students have access to draws a direct and rapid path to real-world applications and the IT job market in Switzerland, Germany and beyond.

SIT and Jacobs University Bremen are launching a roadshow to promote the Master in Computer Science and Software Engineering program as well as inviting students to participate in SIT and JUB STAR Contest. The first roadshow events will take place in Tbilisi, Georgia on April 5-6. Roadshow webpage: <https://web.sit.org/roadshow>



## Land Crumbling, Houses Collapsing in Chiatura, Itkhvisi, Due to Landslides



Image source: FB / Giorgi Makhatadze

BY ANA DUMBADZE

**L**andslides in the village of Itkhvisi, Chiatura Municipality, have damaged houses and roads. Locals say the soil is still moving, making it unsafe for them to live there.

They say the situation has worsened especially in the last month, with cracks appearing in the walls of their houses and also in the ground. They said several houses had collapsed.

Residents of Itkhvisi claim that the

electricity supply was cut off for one day and the water supply for three days.

Locals told Formula TV that several families had already left the village, while others feared their homes would collapse while they were in them.

"[The house] is flooded, the basements are full of water. Everything is broken, we actually swim in the water, and we communicate with each other through phones. We are not sleeping, we sit dressed all the time so that we can run outside quickly and not get cold," one of the locals told Formula.

"Everything I had, I owned, is under the ground now. Luckily, we were out

when the house suddenly started to collapse, and that's how we survived," one of the tearful locals said.

Itkhvisi residents suspect that these processes are the result of company Georgian Manganese digging of a mine to extract manganese under the village. A few months ago, the residents of Shukruti village of the same municipality faced a similar problem due to mining works.

"Georgian Manganese is moving on to another village. It was Shukruti before, now Itkhvisi (between Chiatura and

Sachkhere). At least 11 houses have been destroyed in the last week," say the locals.

The Company denies mining under Itkhvisi.

The company's press service denied the information about manganese mining in or near Itkhvisi and said that they have started an on-site investigation, after which they will release a statement.

Regarding the position of the local City Hall, the press service says their representatives had arrived in the village of Itkhvisi to study the situation.

Chiatura City Hall confirmed that it

will help the affected population with relocation and rent payments.

"We also helped them evacuate the house with cars. Experts were on the spot, still waiting to determine the cause of the collapse. Representatives of the local authorities, the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation and the company Georgian Manganese were already on the spot and the mayor met with the population.

"The amount of damage will be calculated and the causes will be determined by an expert examination," the City Hall said.



Collapsed and cracked roads in Itkhvisi. FB / Giorgi Makhatadze

# About this Article



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

**I**ntended to write this week about one Aleksandr Dugin, the philosopher who has best access to Vladimir Putin's ear, to likely most fearful effect. But this must wait, although now that I have written his name, anyone who has not yet heard of him is free to discover him online. This may be quite an unsettling experience, but also a necessary one. The article would be called something like Dug In? Dig Out.

Instead, I have other subjects. Will I write about the Greek word "meta", which means "about", as in "metaphysics" and many other English words borrowed from that powerful source? This article may, after all, be mostly about itself. Or will it be more about the creative processes I was delighting over last episode, and their confluence in me at

present, occasion of much joy? Including mention of my answer to the recent question someone had, about experiencing being "in the zone" as a creative person and what that was like.

(I was throwing a 22-pound lump of porcelain from one hand to the other, back and forth, across my canvas-covered tabletop for clay work, in Stony Plain, Canada. As the material absorbed moisture from the porcelain, this began to develop cracks in its surface in an entirely natural way, put there by the process and only indirectly by me. The same for its overall shape. Eventually, the piece all but said, "Stop! I'm finished; if you carry on you will spoil me." So I did. I hollowed it out from underneath as best I could, let it dry nice and slowly as one must to avoid cracks, and had it fired. Unfortunately, cracks still came, likely because the piece was so thick, and I was warned that the second firing, to the much higher temperature required of porcelain, could well break it apart. So in that sense it

has never been properly finished as a sculpture, but it remains one of my all-time favorite works, pictured here, called "Madonna and Child". A second one, my "Japanese Piece", spoke to me in a similar way, and again I obeyed and was satisfied. This one I did get to high-fire to completion, another favorite on my short list of sculptures).

Or more about the creative process and what it takes to be a maker of: writing, anything in the visual or motive or musical arts, whatever? Only two things. DO that thing: write, weave, dance, sing, sculpt, whatever. And EXPERIENCE that thing as made by others: read, listen, watch. Repeat. Eventually, your own style will emerge, even if you start out by copying the work of others in your field whom you admire. You will have become an artist in that field, although likely your growth and development in it will never stop.

I have been writing since I was about six, reading a bit longer. Good English is to me like good food, whatever the genre. I go back to the same works again and again if they are that special to me, each time absorbing more. I don't retain much for long, but always remember what was best. Science fiction and fantasy, general fiction, science, history, biography, travel and more. I rarely leave a book unfinished, unless it turns out to be that badly written or I feel that reading it would harm me.

The non-fiction I am currently reading includes a couple of histories of Ukraine, as I feel a need to know more about this so devastated part of the world. While this is more duty than delight, I can still appreciate the information, and it is still well written. Ironic, perhaps, that the "krai" part of Ukraine has meanings in its Slavic roots of borderlands or edges: because, as the heart of what would become Rus',



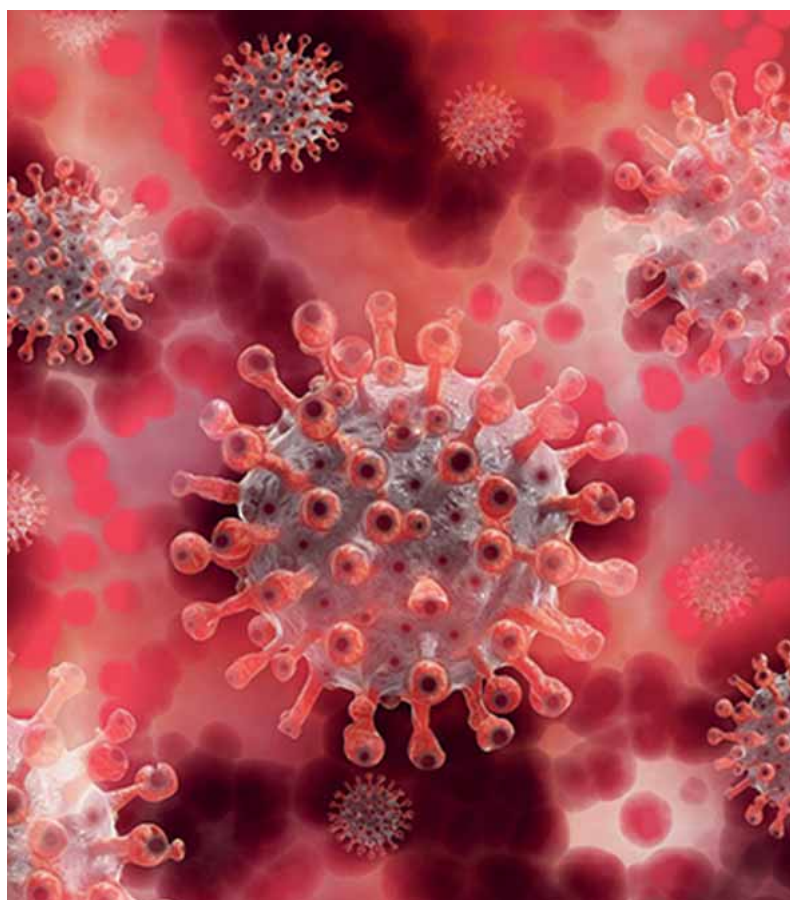
then Russia, Kiev is its mother.

Which only makes this war all the more terrible underneath.

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer and photographer for GT since

early 2011. He runs the "Svaneti Renaissance" Facebook group, now with nearly 2000 members, at [www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/). He and his wife also run their own guesthouse in Etseri: [www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti](http://www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti)

## Georgia Reports 324 New Cases, No Deaths. Gamkrelidze: The Pandemic May End this Year



BY KETEVAN SKHIRTLADZE

**O**nly 324 new cases of coronavirus have been registered in Georgia, no deaths were reported, and 721 people have recovered.

Amiran Gamkrelidze, Director General of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health of Georgia said today that "If nothing extraordinary happens in the biology and evolution of the coronavirus, then most likely, this year, the World Health Organization will announce the end of the pandemic."

A total of 1,650,708 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed in Georgia since February 2020, of which 1,629,987 have recovered and 16,765 have died.

Thursday's newly confirmed cases are divided by region as follows:

165 cases were confirmed in Tbilisi, Adjara - 11, Imereti - 37, Kvemo Kartli - 13, Shida Kartli - 26, Guria - 23, Samegrelo - Zemo Svaneti - 19, Kakheti - 17, Mtskheta-Mtianeti - five, Samtskhe-Javakheti - three, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti - five.

2,863,384 people have been fully vaccinated so far.

On April 6, 376 new cases of coronavirus were confirmed in Georgia, 234 patients recovered and four died.

## CULTURE

### Georgian Actors to Play in Netflix's Extraction 2



Source of image: AT.ge

**G**eorgian actors Tornike Gogrichiani, Tornike Bziava, Tina Dalakishvili and young actor Andro Japaridze are participating in the second part of the Netflix movie "Extraction", which will be released in December 2022.

Dato Bakhtadze and Irakli Kvirikadze

have important roles as participants in a Georgian group. Brothers Tornike Gogrichiani and Tornike Bziava play the roles of Georgian gangsters.

Tina Dalakishvili plays the role of the wife of one of the gangsters, and Andro Japaridze plays the role of her son.

The budget of the first part of "Extraction" was about \$100 million.



**PUBLISHER & GM**  
George Sharashidze

**COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT**  
Commercial Director:  
Iva Merabishvili  
Marketing Manager:  
Natalia Chikvaidze

**EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT:**  
Editor-In-Chief:  
Katie Ruth Davies

**Journalists:**  
Ana Dumbadze,  
Vazha Tavberidze,  
Tony Hanmer,  
Emil Avdaliani,  
Nugzar B. Ruhadze,  
Michael Godwin,  
Ketevan Skhirtladze,  
Mariam Mtvilishvili

**Photographer:**  
Aleksi Serov

**Website Manager/Editor:**  
Katie Ruth Davies

**Layout:**  
Misha Mchedlishvili

**Webmaster:**  
Sergey Gevenov

**Circulation Managers:**  
David Kerdikashvili,  
David Djandigava

**ADDRESS**  
1 Melikishvili Str.  
Tbilisi, 0179, Georgia

Tel.: +995 32 229 59 19  
E: [info@georgiatoday.ge](mailto:info@georgiatoday.ge)  
F: GeorgiaToday

**ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION**  
+995 555 00 14 46  
E-mail:  
[marketing@georgiatoday.ge](mailto:marketing@georgiatoday.ge)

Reproducing material, photos and advertisements without prior editorial permission is strictly forbidden. The author is responsible for all material. Rights of authors are preserved. The newspaper is registered in Mtatsminda district court.

Reg. # 06/4-309



HÔTELS &  
PRÉFÉRENCE  
HUALING TBILISI  
ჰოტელს & პრეფერენს  
ჰუალინგ თბილისი



## Hotels & Preference Hualing Tbilisi

**Book a room at our hotel for 250 GEL and get special benefits:**

- ▶ Combo menu for two at Legends Bar
- ▶ 50% discount on cocktails at Legends Bar
  - ▶ Breakfast for two
  - ▶ Late check out (15:00)
- ▶ Access to swimming pool and gym



For more detailed information, please contact us: +995 322 50 50 25; [info@hotelspreference.ge](mailto:info@hotelspreference.ge)